

Arden

T H E A T R E C O .

SUPPLEMENTARY STUDY GUIDE
for

Assassins

Music & Lyrics by STEPHEN SONDHEIM

Book by JOHN WEIDMAN

Based on an idea by CHARLES GILBERT, JR.

Directed by TERRENCE J. NOLEN

On the F. Otto Haas Stage

September 13 - October 21, 2007

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Assassins

Music and Lyrics by Stephen Sondheim

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Directed by: Terrence J. Nolen

Cast

THE PROPRIETER.....JAY PIERCE
LEON CZOLGOSZ.....CHRISTOPHER PATRICK MULLEN
JOHN HINCKLEY.....TIMOTHY HILL
CHARLES GUTEAU.....JAMES SUGG
GIUSEPPE ZANGARA.....JIM POULOS
SAMUEL BYCK.....SCOTT GREER
LYNETTE (“SQUEAKY”) FROMME.....ERIN BRUEGGEMANN
SARA JANE MOORE.....MARY MARTELLO
JOHN WILKES BOOTH.....JEFFREY COON
THE BALLADEER/LEE HARVEY OSWALD.....BEN DIBBLE

Direction:

DIRECTOR.....TERRENCE J. NOLEN
MUSIC DIRECTOR.....ERIC EBBENGA
STAGE MANAGER.....PATRICIA G. SABATO
ASST DIRECTOR.....MATTHEW DECKER
ASST to the MUSIC DIRECTOR.....DAVID AMES
ASST to the STAGE MANAGERSTEPHANIE COOK

Designers:

SCENIC DESIGNER.....DAVID P. GORDON
COSTUME DESIGNER.....ALISON ROBERTS
LIGHTING DESIGNER.....JOHN STEPHEN HOEY
SOUND DESIGNER.....JORGE COUSINEAU

PLOT SYNOPSIS

This darkly comedic musical jumps in time and place to cover nine of the assassination attempts on the president of the United States, as well as several imagined meetings between the nine assassins. The play opens in a fairground shooting gallery where the Proprietor hawks the benefits of killing a president. One by one, assassins from different time periods including John Hinckley, Leon Czolgosz, Samuel Byck, Charles Guiteau, Giuseppe Zangara, Sara Jane Moore, and Lynette “Squeaky” Fromme purchase guns from him, and their myriad of



varied motivations are alluded to. John Wilkes Booth enters last, introduced by the Proprietor as ammunition is distributed. Offstage a voice announcing Abraham Lincoln’s arrival at the infamous theater is heard. Booth excuses himself, a shot rings out, and Booth is heard to shout the infamous line “Sic semper tyrannis!”, which translated from Latin means ‘Thus always to tyrants’.

In the next scene the Balladeer tells of John Wilkes Booth’s story in the form of a ballad. Booth writes his lofty rationale for murder in his diary as the Balladeer interjects that Booth’s motives had more to do with his failure as an actor and other personal problems than any ideals. Pursued by Union soldiers Booth throws his diary to the Balladeer, who reads aloud Booth’s self-justifications as Booth commits suicide. The Balladeer then concludes that Booth was a madman who ultimately failed, as in his attempt to destroy Lincoln he instead elevated him to martyrdom.

Booth, Czolgosz, Hinckley, Zangara and Guiteau gather in a bar. Byck enters, looking for Richard Nixon, then exits upon learning that he has not been seen. Guiteau toasts the American Dream, telling of his ambition to become Ambassador to France. Zangara complains about his stomach pains, and Booth irrationally suggests fixing them by shooting the President. Hinckley accidentally almost breaks a beer bottle and Czolgosz flies into a rage, describing the horrors he sees in the bottle factory he works in,

and how many men die or are injured to make a bottle like the one Hinckley has just almost shattered. Booth urges him to take control of his fate, and to break the bottle himself, but Czolgosz cannot.

Later, a radio reports that Zangara has tried to assassinate Franklin D. Roosevelt. Five bystanders are interviewed in turn, each telling a different personal version of the event as each one is convinced that he or she personally saved the President. From an electric chair Zangara sings his refusal to be afraid and that he hadn't cared who he killed as long as it was one of the men who control the money. Outraged that there are no photographers at his execution, which he attributes to being what he calls an "American nothing", Zangara is electrocuted.

We meet Leon Czolgosz as he listens, absolutely enraptured, to a speech by American anarchist Emma Goldman. When she finishes he introduces himself to her and declares his love, but she tells him to redirect his passion to the fight for social justice. She accepts his offer to accompany her to the train station to catch her train, but protests at his offer to carry her bag saying "we do not make slaves of each other," but he insists.

Fromme and Moore, the two women in the pack, meet on a park bench as Fromme smokes a joint and speaks of mass murderer Charles Manson, recounting their meeting and declaring herself to be his lover and slave. Juggling her purse and a variety of junk food including a bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken, Moore divulges details of her life including that she is an informant for the FBI (or used to be), has been a CPA, had five husbands and three children, and suffered from amnesia. Fromme declares that Manson will emerge as king of a new order and make her his queen. Moore says she thinks she knew Manson when he was younger. The two women bond on the topic of different relationships (such as father, daughter) and the scene ends as Fromme teaches Moore to give Colonel Sanders the "evil eye" to try and kill him. They mock shooting the bucket with their pistols and dissolve to hysterical laughter on the floor.

Czolgosz appears, reflecting on how many men die in the mines, the iron mills and the steel forge just to make one gun. Booth, Guiteau and Moore enter one by one and join him in a barbershop quartet in which they point out one gun's power to change the world. Czolgosz decides his gun will claim one more victim: the President. We then see Czolgosz at the 1901 Pan American Exposition watching William McKinley shake



President William McKinley

visitors' hands in the Temple of Music Pavilion. The Balladeer sings a ballad telling of Czolgosz's motivations as he joins the receiving line, gun in pocket. When Czolgosz reaches McKinley he shoots him.

Samuel Byck sits in his rundown home, wearing a dirty Santa suit and drinking a Yoo-Hoo. He talks into a tape recorder, preparing a message to Leonard Bernstein, telling the composer

that he can save the world by writing more love songs. Then Byck accuses Bernstein of ignoring him, just like the other

celebrities he has tried to contact and goes into a vicious rampage about the unfairness of the hierarchy in the world and his lonely, disheveled place among it.

Squeaky Fromme sneaks up on John Hinckley as he sits playing his guitar in front of a framed picture. She asks for a song and he says he only knows his own work. As Fromme begins asking about the girl in the picture, Hinckley gets defensive until finally Fromme takes the picture and uncovers the truth about his "girlfriend," Jodie Foster. She throws it in his face how her lover is a real person, alive and in the flesh to her while also viciously mocking him on being in love with a movie star that doesn't even know who he is. He becomes irate and orders her out of his room. After she leaves, he sings of his plans to win the actress's love. Fromme returns to join him, singing of her love for Manson. Hinckley begins to shoot at a photograph of Ronald Reagan projected on the wall but the picture keeps reappearing. The Proprietor returns to mock Hinckley, quoting Reagan's famous quips about the assassination, as Hinckley fires and fires, missing each time.

Charles Guiteau bounds onstage in his generally good natured mood and begins to flirt with Sarah Jane Moore, giving her marksmanship tips before trying to kiss her. She is not interested, however, and after a few moments she finally leaves him alone-much to his surprise. The scene immediately changes to Guiteau's meeting with James Garfield at the train station. Guiteau asks to be made Ambassador to France in accordance with the spoils system (in which those who supported the president during the election were rewarded with federal jobs). When he is rebuffed and mocked, he shoots the President. Immediately following, Guiteau is at the foot of the gallows singing a poem, written that

morning, that he calls "I Am Going To The Lordy". The Balladeer describes his trial and execution in ballad form as Guiteau cheerfully sashays up the stairs to the gallows, optimistically singing of heaven. Guiteau is hanged after claiming hauntingly that he will be remembered.



President Gerald Ford

Next the scene begins with a rogue bullet and a cry from Moore. Squeaky enters and finds that Moore has shot her own dog accidentally. Right afterward, her nine year old son enters squealing and yelling. Squeaky Fromme gives him the fifty cents he is asking for and he runs out. Squeaky then turns and asks Moore why she brought her dog and her son to an assassination. We learn here a bit more insight into Moore when she tells Fromme she would not leave the dog at home alone and that “school was out.” Then the women prepare for their presidential plan, fumbling about as Moore drops all of her bullets. President Gerald Ford enters and humbly tries to help her collect the bullets. As he is leaving, Fromme tries to shoot him but her gun does not go off. Then, in a desperate attempt to fulfill their plot, Moore simply throws her bullets to the back of him and laments their failure.

Samuel Byck is on his way to the airport to hijack a plane, which he plans to crash into the White House. He records a message addressed to Richard Nixon, complaining about contemporary American life and announces that killing a President is the only solution.

The assassins reunite and begin to demand their prizes of the Proprietor. The Balladeer appears and tells them that their actions were never the solution to their problems and that no prizes are offered for killing the president. The assassins realize that they will never get their prizes and begin singing of a new National Anthem about being dispossessed by the American Dream, their song increasing in volume and force until they beat the Balladeer to the ground.

Lee Harvey Oswald appears, preparing to kill himself in a storeroom on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository on Nov. 22 1963. Booth interrupts him like a shadow out of nowhere and begins to claim of how well he knows him. He then tries to fill his head with the idea that killing the president of the United States is all he needs to

solve his problems. Summoning the other assassins from the shadows, Booth tells Oswald that by joining them he will become part of the American experience, but Oswald adamantly and fearfully refuses. Booth tells him that in the future, when Hinckley's room is searched, Oswald's biographies will be found assuring his permanent mark in all of history. Oswald is terrified and thoughts are racing through his head as he again tries to leave, but Booth pleads for help from the other assassin. Zangara then addresses him passionately in Italian, a speech translated by the other assassins, imploring him to act so their own acts can come alive again, reiterating that the bloodshed will not only empower him, but also empower them. As the assassins sing, imploring Oswald to act, he stands at the window where the motorcade for President Kennedy will be passing and shoots.

The scene shifts slowly from a rousing celebration of Oswald to several Americans recounting their personal accounts of where they were and what they were doing when they heard President Kennedy had been shot, and the sinking feeling experienced by all of them that nothing would ever be the same.

The assassins reappear, now with Oswald in their ranks. They are united as a force and restate their motives with a final firing of their guns at the audience.



President John F. Kennedy

About the Playwright



Stephen Joshua Sondheim, born March 22, 1930, is commonly known as his generation's leading writer of the stage musical. Born in New York he grew up in Bucks County, Pennsylvania after his parents divorced. His mother's neighbor was Oscar Hammerstein, who helped influence Sondheim to become a composer. Sondheim has a clearly discernable style, noticeable for his fondness of elegant language and skewed harmonies and a tendency to densely literate lyrics, but even still it is his versatility that impresses, ranging from the explosive band style score of *'Anyone Can Whistle'* (1964) to the Orient-influenced music of *'Pacific Overtures'* (1976) and the elegant waltzes of *'A Little Night Music'* (1973). Sondheim is said to have reinvented the musical during his partnership with producer-director Hal Prince, creating several of the centuries most innovative and experimental musicals. As choreographer Michael Bennett once said, however, you have to know what the rules are before you can break them, and Sondheim knows America's cultural heritage better than anyone. His numerous awards attest to his success, including an Academy Award, multiple Tony Awards (seven in total; more than any other composer), multiple Grammy Awards, and a Pulitzer Prize. His most famous scores include (as composer/lyricist) *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, *Company*, *A Little Night Music*, *Follies*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Into the Woods*, and *Sunday in the Park with George*, as well as the lyrics for *West Side Story* and *Gypsy*. Many of his works have previously been produced at the Arden Theatre Company, including *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, *Sweeney Todd* and *Into the Woods*. Currently, Sondheim is wrapping production of the movie version of his hit *Sweeney Todd*, slated for release in December 2007.

About the Composer

John Weidman is the son of librettist and novelist Jerome Weidman. Since 1986 he has been a staff writer for Sesame Street, for which he has won several Emmy Awards, and currently serves as the president of the Dramatists Guild of America. His previous works include *Pacific Overtures* (1976) and *Anything Goes* (1987) in collaboration with Stephen Sondheim as well as the musical adaptation of *Big* (1996) and *Contact* (2000).



A Brief History of American Assassins



Leon Czolgosz shot President William McKinley on August 31, 1901. He was heavily influenced by anarchists such as Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, and became convinced that killing the President would further his dream of aiding the working man. Czolgosz was born in Detroit in 1873 to Polish immigrants. After being fired from a well paying job on account of a union strike he became interested in anarchy and Marxism but was not formally part of any group because many anarchists feared his vehement belief that violence was the best means to their goals. He demonstrated this by carrying out an assassination purposefully mirroring that of his hero, Gaetano Bresci, who assassinated King Umberto I of Italy, including using the same Iver Johnson revolver used by Bresci. Czolgosz waited in line to shake hands with President McKinley at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo New York. When he reached the President he shot him twice at close range before being beaten by the crowd so badly it was thought he might not live to stand trial. In an ironic twist the X-ray machine had just been invented and was being demonstrated at the Pan-American Exposition. At the time the machine was considered nothing more than a parlor trick, but today it is thought that the use of the machine to locate and remove the bullets would have saved McKinley's life. Czolgosz was executed on October 28, 1901 by electric chair.

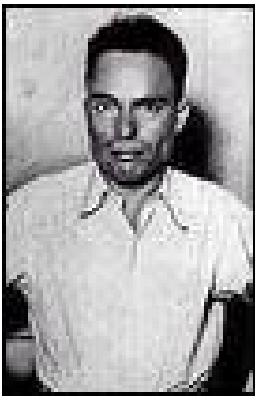


John Hinckley attempted to assassinate President Ronald Reagan on March 30, 1981. Hinckley was born on May 29, 1955 and grew up in Texas. After multiple viewings of the 1976 movie *Taxi Driver* he developed an obsession with actress Jodie Foster, even moving to New Haven to be near the actress while she attended Yale. Eventually he came to believe that he could attract her attention by becoming a historical figure and so decided to kill Reagan. After shooting four people and seriously wounding the president Hinckley was found not guilty on account of the insanity defense. He is currently institutionalized in an asylum. The American public was so scandalized by this use of the insanity defense that it has since been abolished in several states.



Charles Guiteau fatally wounded President James Garfield on July 2, 1881 in a Washington D.C. train station. Born on September 8, 1841 in Freeport Illinois Guiteau was a member of the controversial religious sect known as the Oneida Community before being evicted by the leader John Humphrey Noyes, who considered him insane. At that time there was a political practice known as the spoils system in which those who supported the winning presidential candidate were rewarded with positions in the government regardless of their aptitude or intelligence. This practice led Guiteau to petition for appointment as the United States ambassador to France, because Guiteau believed himself to be responsible for Garfield

winning the election on account of a poorly written and largely plagiarized speech he had given. He conceived of his plan to shoot the president upon not being given the job, convinced that God wanted him to do so. The incident cemented the claims of those who wished to do away with the spoils system and paved the way for the Pendleton Civil Service Reform Act, which placed federal employees based on a merit system. His trial was well covered by the media on account of Guiteau's antics which ranged from arguing with his own defense team to formatting his testimony in epic poems. He was widely hated by the American public and nearly assassinated twice himself during his stay in the St. Elizabeths Hospital for the insane during his trial. Eventually found guilty, he was hung on June 30, 1882 after reciting his final poem, "I am Going to the Lordy", the judge having denied his final request for a band to accompany the presentation of his composition.



Giuseppe Zangara attempted to assassinate President Franklin d. Roosevelt on February 15, 1933. Upon firing on Roosevelt's motorcade in Miami Florida Zangara missed the President but wounded four others and killed the mayor of Chicago Anton Cermak. Zangara was executed on March 20, 1933. There is some speculation that Cermak may have been the intended target all along, as the mayor was an unwavering opponent of Al Capone's Chicago mob organization and connections between Zangara and the mob have been conjectured, but this has never been proven. Born in Ferruzzano, Italy in 1900 Zangara received little education, doing menial work in his home town for several years before immigrating to New Jersey in 1923 and eventually becoming a citizen. He was eventually driven mad by the intense pain he felt in his abdomen, attributed to his gall bladder and which he suspected were the fault of the US government. He wished to kill "all capitalist presidents and kings" he did not care that Roosevelt was elected before he could complete his plan to kill Hoover, as he claimed that they were all the same and made no difference to him. A quirk of Florida state law stipulated that a convicted murderer could not share a cell with another prisoner, and as there was already a prisoner awaiting execution the "death cell" had to be expanded into what is now popularly known as "Death Row" after Zangara's conviction.



Samuel Byck attempted to assassinate President Richard Nixon on February 22, 1974 by hijacking an airliner with the intent of crashing it into the white house. Byck was born on January 30, 1930 and served briefly in the US Army before falling prey to mental illness and admitting himself to a psychiatric hospital. Eventually diagnosed with bipolar disorder he came to believe that several public figures such as Jonas Salk, Abraham Ribicoff, and Leonard Bernstein, as well as the US President, were responsible for his business failures. The Secret Service investigated Byck in 1972 but found him to be harmless, which was later proved untrue when he shot and killed an Aviation Administration Police Officer and attempted to hijack a plane from the Baltimore/Washington International Airport. Byck committed suicide after a standoff

with the police during which he shot both of the pilots. Terming his plot “Operation Pandora’s Box” he left extensive notes and commentaries on his plans and motivations in the form of taped voice messages, including a tape recording sent to news columnist Jack Anderson, because he believed that he would be considered a hero for his actions. Byck’s plane hijacking attempt was referenced in the 9/11 Commission Report, which contributed to the decision to postpone the Broadway revival of *Assassins* that had been planned for 2001.



Lynette “Squeaky” Fromme attempted to assassinate President Gerald Ford on September 5, 1975 in Sacramento’s Capitol Park in the hopes of freeing Charles Manson from prison. Fromme was born on October 22, 1948. She was given the nickname “Squeaky” by Manson when she was a member of the Manson Family. After Manson’s imprisonment for his involvement in the Hinman, Tate, and LaBianca murders Fromme sought to bring attention to him in the hopes of freeing him from prison. Dressed as a nun and armed with a .45 Colt automatic she met with President Ford under the pretense of arguing the plight of the California redwoods, but failed to assassinate him due to loading the gun incorrectly. She is currently serving life in prison.

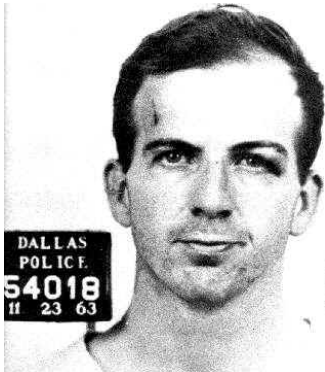


Sara Jane Moore attempted to assassinate President Gerald Ford on September 22, 1975 outside the St. Francis Hotel in San Francisco, a mere seventeen days after Lynette Fromme’s attempt. She fired a single shot before a bystander pushed her to the ground. The Secret Service had evaluated her earlier but decided that she did not pose a threat. Before turning to revolutionary politics at the age of 45 Moore had five husbands and had previously worked as an accountant. Moore was sentenced to life in prison and is scheduled for parole in September 2007.



John Wilkes Booth was born May 10, 1838 in Maryland. A well known actor whose career was faltering, he fatally shot President Abraham Lincoln at the Ford’s Theatre in Washington, D.C. on April 14, 1865 during a production of ‘Our American Cousin’. Booth was a Confederate sympathizer who was vehemently dissatisfied with the South’s defeat in the Civil War. In an elaborate scheme involving several co-conspirators who were later hung, he plotted to kill Vice President Andrew Johnson and Secretary of State William Seward simultaneously. Though Robert E. Lee had surrendered four days before the assassination Booth felt that his cause was not yet lost because Confederate General Joseph Johnston’s army was still fighting Union General Sherman in Georgia. Lee hoped that these murders would help to topple the Union government. Although listing his justifications for the crime as the lofty ideals of defending his beloved South and bringing down a tyrant, there is speculation that his motives had more to do with bad reviews of his acting performances, alcoholism, and jealousy of his brother Edwin. Booth fled the

scene after murdering Lincoln and died in a barn set ablaze by Union troops on April 26, 1865 at the age of 27. His last words were reported to be "Useless, useless."



Lee Harvey Oswald, arguably the most famous assassin, killed President John Kennedy on November 22, 1963. Oswald had a volatile childhood, moving frequently and at times living in an orphanage when his mother could not care for him. Despite professing to be a Marxist Oswald joined the Marines shortly after his seventeenth birthday, probably accepting these conflicting ideologies because of his idolization of his older brother Robert. After an unsuccessful career with the military during which he committed multiple infractions Oswald defected to the Soviet Union. When initially denied Soviet citizenship Oswald attempted suicide. Fearing an international conflict the U.S.S.R. allowed him to stay, but kept him under KGB surveillance. When he grew bored with the lack of opportunities available to him in Minsk, he returned to the U.S. in 1962, bringing with him his wife Marina Prusakova and their child. Equally dissatisfied with life in the U.S. and the menial jobs he held he formed a plan to assassinate General Edwin Walker, whom he considered a fascist. Walker escaped with minor injuries, and police had no suspects until Oswald's home was searched after the JFK assassination and his connection was proven. Discontent with life in America Oswald moved several times, residing briefly in New Orleans and Mexico while attempting to move to Cuba. Eventually he lived in Dallas, where he shot President John F. Kennedy from the sixth floor of a warehouse as the President's motorcade passed by. When a police officer apprehended him for suspicious behavior Oswald shot him as well. During police interrogation during the two days he was held in a detention facility Oswald denied everything, ranging from the murders themselves to having ever used a gun. Oswald was shot and killed by Jack Ruby on live television before he could be brought to trial. Due to several unusual circumstances and the fact that not all of the findings of the Warren Commission have been released controversy continues to surround the assassination to this day, and a myriad of conspiracy theories exist, including the possibility of a second shooter and the supposed involvement of multiple other organizations.

Production History

In the late 1980's Sondheim read a script by playwright Charles Gilbert (who currently runs the musical theatre department at The University of the Arts), for which Gilbert had researched many of history's most notorious assassins. Sondheim asked for and received permission to use Gilbert's idea. Collaborating with his partner John Weidman (whom he had worked with previously on *Pacific Overtures*), Sondheim's original idea was to explore the lives of assassins throughout history beginning with Brutus and Julius Caesar. When this concept proved to be too vast Sondheim and Weidman chose to limit themselves to assassins who had tried to kill the President of the United States. They dramatize the theory that the most infamous killers of our time are products of our culture, that despite their many differences they have much in common with each other and with ourselves. *Assassins* first opened off Broadway on January 27, 1990 with a run that sold out, despite its brevity. Two years later on October 29, 1992 *Assassins* opened in London, running for 76 performances and winning critical acclaim. The Broadway revival was scheduled for fall of 2001, but in light of the sensitive subject matter and the recent events of September 11th the decision was made to postpone the show until 2004. When the show finally premiered on Broadway it won five Tony Awards, including Best Revival, Best Actor in a Musical, Best Orchestration, Best Lighting Design, and Best Director. The 2004 production was also noted for the innovative set design which included projecting the Zapruder film of the death of JFK onto the t-shirt of the actor portraying Lee Harvey Oswald, a feat which had never before been attempted on stage. Each production has been unique, with certain roles sometimes combined. A new song "Something Just Broke" was added to the London production that did not appear in the original premiere. "Something Just Broke" is sung by the cast of *Assassins* in the Arden Theatre Company's production, using each actor as a double for a regular American citizen.

Cultural Impact

By embellishing upon the narrow biographies available of America's assassins, *Assassins* forces the viewer to consider the motivations of such people. Figures about which little more is known than their attempt to kill a president become fully fleshed out characters and complex human beings instead of just simple monsters. Sondheim suggests that political murderers are a product of the American political culture and that perhaps to some degree America is responsible for these actions. The musical seeks to portray several of history's most maligned and hated figures sympathetically without taking away from the horror of their crimes. By using the ruse of a playground shooting range where the assassins initially gather, the creators establish a common ground with the personalities. This setting ultimately allows them each to share not only with each other what they have to lose and what they have to offer, but also with their audience. Whatever else may be implied in the production however, the true message is clear: that "madmen don't make the rules, and guns don't right the wrongs."

Discussion Questions

1. Is assassination a viable form of protest? What do you think the perspective of the writers was on this issue?
2. What are some common themes that link the assassins?
3. Some of the assassins were either self diagnosed or diagnosed by professionals as “insane.” To what degree is this valid, and in that same vane, to what degree are all of the assassins insane?
4. Are the forces that shape America’s culture and counterculture things that can be controlled?
5. Though all of the encounters between the assassins were fictional, was the characterization of the assassins plausible?
6. How does the music change to reflect the different characters and time periods?
7. With the exception of Byck all the assassins used guns, viewing them as the ultimate weapon. What does this say about their ideas of power? What does it say about Byck’s ideas of power?
8. Is there a noticeable difference in the reaction to assassinations by immigrant like Czolgosz or Zangara? What is it?
9. Do you think that the fact that *Assassins* is a musical instead of a play adds anything? Does it take anything away?
10. What meaning can be taken away from the inclusion of Lee Harvey Oswald at the end of the show?